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Music leadership in opera stage direction Strehler and virtual art training

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Abstract

For the integral formation of the human being, attention to aesthetic education presents a virtual training that deserves attention to all the educational activities related to it. In this sense, and in the field of opera, the contribution of music leadership –in the articulation of arts involved in staging– is key to the necessary aesthetic experience. The "critical" direction of Giorgio Strehler provides the rationale that justifies the stage direction of opera from the musical drama, for which we present in this research a case that shows how the convergence of arts, in the staging of opera linked by the score, is an avenue for aesthetic education of the individual.

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1. Introduction

Based on the currently widespread belief in the need of integral education of the human being, education or aesthetic training as well as moral, intellectual and civic affective education is found within the overall educational activities necessary for the human being to realize integral personal growth. In this sense, through Delors Report, in 1996 UNESCO collects the four pillars of educational performance to which education should be directed to form the human being, selecting the educational goals for the century in which we are: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be (Delors, 1996, 95-108). In this line of action, the competence-based training of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is contextualized in the XXI century; this leads to the teaching dimension, which provokes aesthetic education through art.

Arts virtual training resides then in the knowledge of reality it provides. Its way of doing, orders the sensitive powers towards the intellectual powers of man, so that "the educational impact on them present sensitive objects and promote the exercise of these powers in order to seek action of the superior intellectual powers" (Altarejos and Naval: 2000). Therefore, the presentation of this sensitive reality can be very determining in the development of aesthetic education.

However, for a person's education to be integral, it cannot be divorced from the rationality of both teaching and learning. In other words, in order for this rationale to be seen from learning, it must first be taken into account in teaching. This is the logical development of the educational activity presented in this article, from studying the opera stage direction of Giorgio Strehler, we can glimpse an own way of acting that determines and rationally facilitates the viewer access to the aesthetic experience, and thus, facilitates access to the knowledge of reality.

"Critical" direction performed by Giorgio Strehler is due to a broader understanding of theater and opera. For Strehler, this is about artistic events that contain a moral and ethical basis on which the author or composer shows a clear communicative purpose. With these premises, Strehler addresses the direction called "critical", in which certain aspects take precedence over others to consistently articulate the drama of the opera in its staging. The director is therefore required to critically compare the available sources he counts on in order to extract the truth of the work. Only in this way, the transmission of the intention of the artwork is ensured, and therefore, its natural expression in drama.

On the other hand, in the exercise of "critical" direction in the opera of Strehler, those elements, that are noted as key to understanding the leadership of music as an articulator of the different artistic dramas involved in setting scene, are highlighted. This leadership, an element of coherence and dramatic unity, points out the guidance and direction of each of the disciplines involved in the staging, and thus, governs in this way the dramatic actions of representation, excluding those which only hinder the manifestation of the intent of the work. It becomes the condition for the viewer's aesthetic experience which could not be done without aesthetic education itself.

As Strehler sees the "critical" direction of the staging of opera, music leadership at the various potentialities of expression, which contribute to the representation, can ensure that the visual perception of the scene does not die in the simple impression but converge to the knowledge of reality that contributes to a multidisciplinary and unified whole of spectacle of opera. Ultimately, this allows us to assess the musical leadership in the approach to stage direction as a condition of possibility to ensure the aesthetic education through the opera.

2. Fundamentals of training of music in the opera stage model of director Giorgio Strehler

The study of the evolution of musical drama shows how dramatic truth has been sought ever since the birth of opera, in a system of balance between music and speech, based on the necessary coherence in a work of art to express her true beauty.

Giorgio Strehler, talks about the musical interpretation of a work by referring to it as something that can never be totally objective (Strehler, G.: 1994). The stage scene manager is the one who thinks how to run this dialectical tension between the musical page and dramatic action, always taking as a unifying element the musical score. There are composers who already resolve this problem themselves, as is the case of Mozart or Verdi. But in other times, the stage manager must take this competition to the benefit of dramatic unity of the opera. However, the origin of this style of leadership led by music is not accidental and may be found in the same sources from where Giorgio Strehler was formed. There are many influences which shape his view of the stage direction, but the following lines present the ones that have shaped the basics of it: Carlo Goldoni, Jacques and Louis Juvet Copeau.

In the preface of the first volume of the collection of comedies of Goldoni in the Bettinelli's edition (Venice, 1750), Goldoni exposes the reasons for a reform in the Italian comedy for the first time (Zampieri, F.: 1954, 185). From his analysis, his concept of theater and its service to humanity is clear. Goldoni, as then did Strehler, looks for a stage performance that leads to that simplicity and naturalness that go directly to the heart of man. This is an appeal to the ethical and moral role of the theatrical performance, keeping as reference, written text source as an expression of intent and message of the author. Only this way, the viewer can feel involved in the contemplation of what is represented, establishing a relationship between Theatre and the World (Zampieri, F.: 1954, 192).

Strehler claims to have inherited the moral responsibility of the theater from Jacques Copeau when being aware that theater is something that can improve humanity, which can also influence the world as it communicates directly with man. This moral responsibility in first place, translates into a great respect for the sources in the text. If the scene is the way that interprets the meaning of the text, the balance between them should exist, so that the author of the text or the composer of the score can transmit his creation. It is a matter of unity between the sources and representation. Fidelity to the text of the initial creation ensures that the re-creation process is as such. Otherwise, it would be a new creation, but not a revision of the poet exhibition.

On the need to maintain the sense of the text to interpret it correctly, Copeau states:

The great poet has traced all the way through which the great interpreter should pass. He has had all networks. We cannot escape. Our mission is to follow the design of his work, not to dislocate it; fill his mold, not to make it explode. Interpretation is undoubtedly a second creation, but that fits, penetrates, fertilizes, and makes the first creation one breath. It may not be lowly to it, provided that it is completely subdued. It is only "original" on the condition that it adheres to the origin itself, at the beginning and in the source of what he plays, that is, the spirit of the poet (Copeau, J.: 2002, 301).

There is no doubt that in opera the music situation is privileged in relation to the words and action, but in Strehler's view this does not make it independent from the other components, instead, these elements depend on it. Fidelity in this case will be referred to the musical text, which will mark the sense of drama, around which this unit will be formed into an inseparable whole. This constant concern for the truth of the work that finds basis in the fidelity to the original text is due to the moral sense that both Strehler and Copeau give the theater.

Jouvet was a pupil and collaborator of Copeau, therefore it is not surprising that their thinking is in the same theatrical line, and that it is born from the same thought of Copeau, thus, it appears as a deepening of it. Strehler said that Jouvet (whom he met and with whom he worked) has taught him to love theater as a human, its problems and difficulties, accepting it and living it as a human work as well. To Jouvet, the text is also of great importance. So much so, that somehow he implies that it is through it, how a reform to theater can be done. Theater is objectively seen as full of problems because it is something human, so the construction material of art itself presents problems of contradiction.

The characterization of the stage director that makes Strehler does not oppose to the one of Jouvet's, however, it is a more defined profile in its practical functions compared to the ones of Jouvet when he says that "putting on stage, is to administer the spiritual goods of the author, taking into account the temporal needs of the theater" (Jouvet, L.: 1952, 208-209).

Possessing a solid musical training, in the case of staging of opera, Strehler calls for a direction that integrates the stage director and the musical director, with the aim of revealing the truth of the work. In this regard, and referring to his opera staging (started with *La Traviata* at Teatro alla Scala in 1947), Strehler says:

I must honestly say that it encourages me a lot to break the traditional structures - held at the opera for a long time - and, if music I like, let us transfer the anachronism of the script and develop the musical idea.

Assuring the staging of a lyric work means for me to find the midpoint, the fundamental balance between tradition and reality, in close liaison with the argument and the composer, or, better yet, find a «logic» of the work or at least get as close as possible to a «plausible» solution (Strehler, G.: 1980, 186).

This balance that Strehler talks about is not understood within the opera if not through the musical drama. However, it will require not only knowledge but an understanding of the musical score so that it can put into scene and that it can articulate to the other dramas. Strehler relates to a broader concept of knowledge of the score, since it is also the point of connection between music and other arts involved in staging, thus being the origin of his stage opera direction.

3. Music as director of the dramatic scene: leadership that enables the aesthetic experience

The origins of opera in the Renaissance *Camerata* were actually misleading. Several factors converge in a given historical and cultural moment: the attempt to imitate the way of reciting of ancient Greece, the predilection for monodic singing to polyphony, etc. From the first moment dialectic is revealed which will become extended within time between the musical page and the dramatic action and where the bottom lies the confrontation between music and words to achieve the hegemony of one of the two in the opera show.

But the truth is that aside from these vicissitudes, the staging of an opera inevitably need coherence between all its parts, including all the arts involved, in order to express something true that is above what produced aesthetic admiration is. This consistency is given by the unity of all the dramas that congregate in the stage performance and have been gradually incorporated in the various stages through which the opera has forged its biography. But to find that unity in the work, one must have a starting point, a landmark, a focal point of the other that makes possible the emergence of art and the truth itself about the artist.

Currently, the intermediary between the viewer and the work is without doubt the director. The interpretation that underlies all opera performance bears its imprint as stated by Giorgio Strehler when saying that it is the stage manager who is faced with the problem of its interpretation:

On one side is the abstraction "no object" of music, and secondly, the particular aspect, the drama objective, and the theater history. These two worlds attempt to merge into opera, but hardly ever approximate results of fairly height. Even though because of the problem of interpretation of the lyrical works, it is one of the most difficult ones out there, insoluble in the limit. Limit against coming to crash the interpreter, and in our case, the stage manager (Strehler, G.: 1994, 80).

But Strehler also believes that "in the opera, it is clear that music is the heart and motor. Sound dimension is everything, is the basis for action" (Strehler, G.: 1994, 80).

Shares this view, the Spanish stage director Simon Suárez, who states:

If we accept as a starting point that opera is theater, it is clear that to stage an opera; one has to start, logically, to develop a drama. That is, by analyzing the score, and then, building on it the other theater parameters (Lagos, M.: 1994, 30).

If conventions are determinants of the form of artistic expression in a particular time, it will be through the study of these conventions where you will find the key to its interpretation. The criterion of the stage manager must be based on direct study of musical sources, which will actually be generating the staging of opera.

Thus, as Suárez, "staging (...) can only come from understanding the essence given by the score. It is the only source from which we can feed in order to get a coherent discourse" (Suárez, S.: 1994, 39).

The practice of staging should be addressed to finding this way of letting the author speak, letting the message flow of one's work, so it is not something alien to the audience who receives it.

Strehler uses the symbols of staging, but they are always inserted in the interior part, which takes place inside the viewer and is setting his aesthetic experience. The staging must be in accordance with the motions caused by the music Opera; otherwise, this gap would prevent the realization of the truth of the work and the aesthetic experience of the viewer.

4. The specific case of *Le nozze di Figaro* by Mozart, directed by Giorgio Strehler

From the origins of the opera there has been an artistic controversy between the exercise of leadership of the word and music in the dramatic action. There are several factors that explain the subordination of one or the other in different historical periods. But it is no coincidence that the stage direction that Strehler does of Mozart's *dapontianas* operas be a clear example of this musical leadership, since it brings together the Mozart's dramaturgical precepts and Strehler's ideas about the truth of the theater and its relationship with the world, respect for the author and actor, fidelity to the original text, the role to be exercised by the stage manager as an intermediary between the creator of the work and the world, and the use of the stage and all the components.

For Strehler, Mozart is a rooted view in his time, accepting its conventions, fashion, thinking, etc. but without quitting changing it. In Mozart he finds "the ideal artist's mission: to be always present, linking the present with the past and projecting the present into the future" (Strehler, G.: 1980, 188). In some ways, both share the same "critical" direction concept.

For Mozart's music should enjoy a position of superiority or at least equality with poetry (but in any case no inferiority or dependence), mostly in the composition of opera where the tension between them is a constant since its inception. In particular, we note the case of the cavatina (aria of small dimensions) of the Countess Almaviva character in Act II of *Le nozze di Figaro* by Mozart. This is the most significant character in this little aria and we can see the appropriateness of all the drama of the scene to the musical drama of Mozart, which is what really leads the psychological featuring of the character. This cavatina presents the character by defining its personal features through music and the psychological moment in which it is located.

The piece appears in the score with indication of *Larghetto* tempo, with which Mozart aims to put in a slow time in contrast to the last of the earlier act. The main key in cavatina is Eb M, reserved then for *ombra* scenes, so you would expect modulations introduced were between similar tones, though they are only found in the instruments of the orchestra when accompanying the cavatina, and in the melody of the Countess are brief modulations to the dominant (Bb M) in the middle of its performance, mostly in the key of the tonic. The effect of this key (Eb M) joins the movement in contiguous degrees, to the slowness of tempo and the "perfect dosage between song syllable and brief vocalizations" (Mila, M.: 2003, 70).

To Abert, this lack of modulation is a way to express the various feelings that occur inside the mind of the Countess without one can prevail over another, so that "nostalgia, trust, hope and sweet hopes continually intertwine" (Abert, H.: 2000, 278). Mozart is not intended here to conduct live-action music (for which he would have modulated towards the dominant tone) but what it does is make a clear statement of the psychological warfare that takes place in the mind of the Countess and her inside.

The Countess cavatina corresponds to one of the major changes made by Mozart and Da Ponte in regards to Beaumarchais' original comedy to give the character more human relevance. This is the only one of the main characters that remains to be discovered and which is given (separated from the others, with a cavatina in the purist line of what the expression of feelings meant in an aria, etc.) a particular highlight, different from the French comedy. In the case of the Countess, everything is thought to contribute to the overall effect of balance, to point out

this feature as one of the most distinctive in the character. Strehler's staging reflects the concept of his fidelity to Mozart's score, looking for originality in the origin of the work, in his musical drama.

For the second act, Strehler shows a realistic decoration and in the rest of the performance, in contrast to Mozart, who in the score only indicates that there must be a highly decorated room with three doors, which are necessary for the passage of the subsequent action. We are before a conical perspective that aims to give a depth to the room of the Countess from the standpoint of the viewer. The bed of the countess, with the canopy and the platform set forth in the right wall of the room. In the same and both sides of the bed, two doors, the cabinet and the service of the countess. At bottom, the door that goes straight to the room, and left the window overlooking the garden.

The light enters through the two large windows to the left of the picture plane. This is a change in lighting from the first act. Now the bending of the light brings us to midday. The other decorative elements are features of noble bedroom furniture: a dressing table with mirror and a screen put us in a feminine room, decorated in the style of the eighteenth century. The hues of the costumes for the Countess, bed, curtains, furniture, etc., are light shades in which yellow is dominating also for The Countess dress, whom we see as the theater curtain opened. The Countess is in her room; with the clothes she would wear to be in her rooms before dressing for the day, moving slowly across the stage, with the particular attitude of someone who is overwhelmed by his thoughts. These become confidence when she begins to sing her cavatina at the beginning of Act II. The environment described by Strehler is serene, tranquil, and suitable for confidences and reflections.

The presentation of the Countess with a cavatina could be considered typical of serious opera, both its form and its content is done in a proper theatrical decorative frame, appropriate for the psychological state which brings us to the musical drama. The slow movements of the Countess and the atmosphere in the room with the light of noon harmonize very well with the Larghetto tempo that is supposed to cavatina, introduced visually with the image of the room, which the viewer is given as the curtains open.

The weight of the character of the Countess is noted from the outset in the drama of this cavatina. This character addresses the theme of the opera with the forgiveness of the last act, so the importance of psychological characterization in her first appearance before the viewer, is of great importance. Strehler draws a Countess in accordance with a drama line in the score, knowing the depth that Mozart gives the character when she expresses her love to the Count in this cavatina: her clothes, her bedroom, her objects, the way to move and address Figaro and Susanna are besides belonging to a character of nobility, a delicacy not feigned or frivolous, unlike the character of the Countess in the original comedy by Beaumarchais.

5. Conclusions

The unity between stage performance and musical drama is a nontransferable contribution of the stage manager, forming the unity and coherence of the representation.

As seen in the specific example of the cavatina of Act II of *Le nozze di Figaro* by Mozart, the expression of the composer's intention is manifested in the dramatic musical score.

Giorgio Strehler and "critical" direction which he performs in his staging promote the integration of all arts which contribute to the opera to be articulated around music, so as to produce the aesthetic experience in the viewer. By means of this experience, an aesthetic education that contributes to the formation of the human person can be developed.

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